THE VVAY TO A BLESED E-STATE IN THIS LIFE.

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THE VVAY TO A BLESSED ESTATE IN THIS LIFE.

THAT which our Lord Iesus from Heauen writ vnto the Church of *Sardis*; *Thou hast a name that thou liuest, but art dead*, may be truly spoken of the greater sort of not-counterfeit Professors of the Faith in our time: for it is cleare by the Text, that this is not spoken of hypocrites, who are starke dead, but Reu. 3.

Many drowsie professors.

of such who hauing some life remaining in them, are in a dead sleepe: for these of whom I speake, take good paines to keepe vp a name of Christianitie, both in the exercises of Religion, and in their outward behauiour, (though in both there be much fayling,) but in very truth there is but a little life of faith and loue in all their Profession, as may appeare in their cold and vncomfortable prayers, in their wandering and drowsie hearing of the Word, and vnfruitfull receiuing of the Sacraments, and much more in their abuse and neglect of the secret exercises of Prayer, reading, and meditation by themselues, and conference with others, seldome deeply bewrayling their estate, lesse reioycing in the assurance of their saluation by Christ, as seldome delighting in God, with a zeale to set forth his glorie in euery part of

heir life.

Though this be the ſtate of the greater part of thoſe that haue ſome truth of grace in them, yet may we ſay again, that there are with vs, (as in the Church of *Sardis*) *a few names that haue not defiled their garments.* that is, doe liue vnrebukably, and walke worthy their holy calling, hauing a ſweet feeling of Gods fauour vnto them, and ſo can boldly come vnto him in time of need, with aſſurance that he doth graciouſly reſpect them, their prayers, and vnfeigned obedience; who likewiſe doe more delight themſelues in God, then in all earthly things, accountining it their greateſt griefe to offend him, and greateſt ioy to pleaſe him; poſſeſſing their ſoules with confidence and patience in their greateſt tryals, looking for the appearing of Chriſt. A few worthy.

This is that bleſſed eſtate to be

What a bleſſed life here may be attained.

inioyed in this life, which God hath prepared, (though in diuers meaſures) for the faithfull, all which may well be contained in this ſhort ſentence of the *Pſalmiſt*, Pſal. 37.v.4. *Delight thy ſelfe in the Lord, he will giue thee thy hearts deſire*: which I doubt not but all true Chriſtians (when they haue well conſidered it) would be glad to attaine vnto: But either through ignorance of the way how to attaine it; or through negligence; not putting in practice what they know: they ſpend many yeeres, either ſecurely, or vncomfortably; ſeldome attaining to that heauenly feaſting, which (if they were wiſe) might be their daily refreſhing: whoſe eſtate I much tendring, doe endeuour to ſhew them, how this happie life may be attained; which I conceiue to be only by a more plentifull feeding vpon Chriſt by faith. It is without que-

Deſire by many, not attained.

How this life is attained.

question, that all and euery part of our spirituall life is in Christ, *of whose fulnesse we receiue grace for grace:* and this is as cleare that we receiue no grace first or last from Christ, but by beleeuing: in which respect Christ is truely and principally said to be our spirituall food, and beleeuing to be the true feeding vpon him. Which being so, it necessarily followes, that feeding seldome, or weakely; we cannot haue much spirituall strength: and otherwise feeding plentifully and soundly, wee shall be fat, and flourishing in grace, and so attaine vnto the blessed life spoken of.

Ioh. 1,16.

Ioh. 6,27. 33,34. 57

For the better vnderstanding and practising whereof, this is specially to be considered, How euery true beleeuer may daily, yea, oft in the day, by faith feed vpon Christ, that so he may receiue from him all spirituall nourishment, for his refreshing

How to feed oft in the day on Christ

and ſtrengthening to euery good worke.

This is done by ſetting before vs thoſe ſweet promiſes, which God hath made to vs, for the ſtrengthening of our faith in all our neceſſities: and, ſo particularly to apply them to our ſelues. Whereby we may comfortably aſſure our ſelues, that we ſhall enioy that which God hath promiſed. Wherein we are firſt to get the true meaning of that which is promiſed.

Secondly, To ſee we haue a good warrant, that this is promiſed to vs, that thereupon we may conclude, we ſhall certainly enioy that which God hath promiſed, ſeeing he is faithfull who hath promiſed.

Exãples. But ſeeing this is not well conceiued by many, I will make it plaine by example. 1. *Cor.* 1. 30. it is ſaid; *But of him are yee in Chriſt Ieſus, who of God is made vnto vs wiſedome, and righteouſneſſe,*

nesse, and sanctification, and redemption. In which is as much said as may be conceiued, or desired; the meaning whereof is, that euery true beleeuer, is by Gods spirit made a liuing member of Christ Iesus, from and in whom, he is made by God a true partaker of all things needfull to saluation: that whereas he is by nature fooliſh, guiltie, filthy, and in bondage, now in Christ he is made perfectly wise, righteous, holy, freed from all his enemies, and so restored to full happinesse. This promise of God being clearely vnderstood, must now be applyed particularly by euery beleeuer to himselfe, thus: Seeing God who is all-sufficient, and faithfull, hath in his Word, which is Truth it selfe, promised these great benefits (in which all are contained) to euery true beleeuer, therefore I who doe truely, though weakely, beleeue in

Christ; may boldly assure my selfe, that all these be mine, and therefore I shall not want any thing needfull for my present comfort, or eternall happinesse. Which whosoeuer doth daily practise in this manner to maintaine, and increase his faith by application of this, and all other of Gods promises, he shall daily more and more enioy in this life that blessed estate we speake of.

Pray for faith.

But for as much as faith is the gift of God and we cannot further beleeue then wee be drawne by Gods spirit, therefore we must ioyne often, and feruent prayer; that God by this meanes would increase our faith.

Not easie

This may seeme easie to be performed, but vpon better tryall, it will not be found so easie to doe it effectually; for besides our owne great vntowardnesse to beleeue, I cannot thinke

of

of any dutie, wherein our common Aduersary will vse more cunning, and diligence to hinder vs, then in this: either by keeping vs from the worke, or beguiling vs in it: whereby it comes to passe, that very few doe (to any good purpose) practise the same.

Two chiefe lettes.

Amongst many lettes which hinder the faithfull practice hereof, I obserue these two, in two diuers sorts of beleeuers. The former in those, who not sufficiently feeling their wants, and too much contented with their estate, doe not so prize Christ, and this blessed estate in him, as may moue them to take this paines, and therefore neuer reach vnto this growth in grace, whereunto they might come, if the fault were not in themselues. The other let, is in those who highly priziog the benefit, and earnestly labouring for it, are by the sense of their owne vn-

1. Not prizing Christ.

2 Our vnworthi-nes.

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unworthineſſe, ſo kept downe, that they cannot with any hope ooke vp, for ſo great a bleſſing.

Remoue of the firſt ſort.

For the remooving of both theſe ſortes, the firſt ſort are to bethinke themſelues, what an vncomfortable account it will be, when God ſhall call them to it, to ſee how many yeares they haue ſpent, with little growth in grace, either to the glorie of God, or good example to others, or to the peace of their owne ſoules. Whereas on the other ſide, they might haue attained vnto ſuch a ſweet life, as would haue beene a heauen vpon earth: namely, *To reioyce alwayes in the Lord.*

Of the ſecond ſort.

For the other poore ſoules, who are kept downe with the ſenſe of their owne vnworthineſſe, they are to know, that all Gods promiſes are free and vndeſerued, ſo as no vnworthineſs ought to hinder them from beleeuing:

leeeing, yea, rather they that haue the most sense of their owne vnworthinesse, haue most incouragement to beleeue, for that voyce of Christ, *Come vnto me all you that are weary and heauie laden, and I will ease you,* serues not onely for our first conuersion, but in all our distresses whatsoeuer, throughout the whole course of our life. Mat. 11. 28.

If any escape both these lets, and goe about this worke, then will Satan vse all his skill to beguile both sorts; such as are weake and heauie hearted, soone discouraged, he tempts and perswades, they labour in vaine, and doe not beleeue, when indeed they doe, as shall appeare. The other sort who are too well conceited, and light-hearted, Satan labours to perswade, that they haue more faith then indeed they haue, and that their case is better then in truth it is. Satan will beguile. Some, that they beleeue not: Others, that they haue more faith then they haue.

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It ſhall be therefore the wiſedome of all who will not be deceiued, carefully to examine & try themſelues; which that they may the better doe, let them conſider of theſe markes that follow: whereby either ſort may certainely iudge of themſelues.

Foure markes of faith not ſeene.

For ſuch as conſcionably endeuour to nouriſh their faith in ſuch manner as hath beene ſhewed, and yet finde no comfort, but feare they doe not beleeue, (when as indeede they doe) theſe are to diſcerne their faith by ſuch ſecret operations, as doe certainely ſhew faith to be there, though it be not ſeene: namely, An vnfeigned griefe for the want of faith, with an vnceſſant indeuour for the attaining of it. Againe, A reuerent eſteeme of God, and heartie affection of vnfeigned loue to him, which cannot be without ſome former apprehenſion of

1. Griefe for want of faith.
2. Conſtant labour for it.
3. True loue to God.

Gods

Gods loue to them, which is in many, (though they ſee it not.) And laſtly. A tender Conſcience, fearing to diſpleaſe God, euen in ſmaller matters, which others little regard. Whoſoeuer ſhall finde theſe fruits, (which cannot come but from faith) may certainly know, that there is a roote of faith grounded in their hearts, though thay ſee it not. But ſuch as haue no feeling of their faith, and ſee no ſuch effects in their liues, haue iuſt cauſe to thinke that they haue no faith at all.

4. A tender conſcience.

No fruits, no faith.

As for the other ſort, who are too well perſwaded of themſelues, that they finde comfort in meditating on Gods promiſes, whereas indeed they deceiue themſelues, and haue not that faith they imagine, as their fruits doe ſhew.

Notes of true and falſe comfort.

This may be diſcerned by theſe notes;

First, True comfort is vſual-

1. True, is hardly got.

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ly very hardly gotten, with much prayer and labour, and it is oft a long time before this be felt: therefore they who vpon their first thoughts on these promises, finde comfort that they haue part in them, may so farre mistruft, all is not sound, till they shall see some better proofe thereof: which if they doe not, but for all this will be confident, that all is well, it is to be feared, their comfort is not sound.

2. Feare of deceit.

For this is another propertie of that true comfort which springs from faith, especially in young and weake beleeuers, that they (so highly valewing the benefit,) are very fearefull of being deceiued, and muft see good euidence before they will be perswaded, that they haue this sauing faith.

3. Poore in spirit, mourne, and lowly

Whereof if they shall be perswaded, yet therewithal is ioyned such a feeling of the weakenesse of

of their faith, and so of all grace, as makes them poore in their owne eyes, and mourne for their wants, thinking lowly of themselues, and more highly reuerencing the graces of God in others. Whereas they who be deceiued, are as the Laodiceans, rich and wanting nothing, and so be merry, and too lighthearted, thinking too well of themselues, and too slenderly of others, better then themselues.

Another sure marke of sensible faith and comfort, is this, That they that haue tasted of it, can neuer be satisfied, but still hunger and labour for more: none more diligently vse all good meanes to grow in grace then they: Euen as the strong and most healthfull bodie, doth feed better then the weake and sickly. But such as being well satisfied with that they haue, & feele no hunger, nor labour for more, it is euidens their faith and

4. Hunger and labour for more.

and comfort are not good.

5. Answerable obedience.

To proceed, and not to gather all that might be added hereto, this shall serue for all; That as like fire, like heate: so like faith, like life, great or small. So that where there is strong faith, there must needs be great obedience, and therefore whosoeuer he be that is careleſſe of his conuersation, and barren in the fruits of a holy life, his faith must needs be weake, if not dead.

Wherefore to conclude, I aduise euery one, who by these markes shall discerne himselfe to be deceiued with fancie in stead of faith, to goe about this worke more seriously, and to lay a better foundation of faith, and not to say, he hath found comfort, till he can bring good witnesse thereof. Which whosoeuer shall neglect, shall in the end (to say no more) lament his folly, when he who seeing his error, shall more carefully and con-

conſtantly put in practiſe this maine dutie of daily feeding vpon Chriſt; ſhalll grow in grace, and attaine to that bleſſed life here, whereof we ſpeake, beſides eternall life, the full reward of all his labours.

FINIS.